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SUBJECT: TURKEY: AK PARTY SEES DENKTAS AS OBSTACLE TO
CYPRUS SOLUTION

REF: ANKARA 8976

Classified by Acting DCM Scot Marciel. Reason:1.5(b)(d)

1. (C) Summary: The political debate in Ankara regarding Turkey's EU candidacy and the future of Cyprus is revealing sharp differences between the ruling AK (Justice and Development) Party/Government and the Establishmentarian foreign policy class, including elements that predominate in the MFA. The fulcrum of the debate is "TRNC President" Denktas. Hailed by the Establishment as the one and only representative of Turkish Cyprus, Denktas is seen by AK as a major liability, complicating efforts to find a solution to the decades-old Cyprus dispute and threatening Turkey's own EU bid. While the MFA continues to rally around Denktas, AK is subtly trying to undermine him. AK officials support Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot equities on the island, but calculate that the voting public is nevertheless increasingly weary of the stalemate and receptive to the notion that Establishmentarian intransigence is counterproductive. End summary.

2. (C) The outcome of the Dec. 12-13 EU summit Copenhagen is regarded by Turks as a mixed blessing. The EU admitted the Republic of Cyprus as a member while giving Turkey a conditional date of Dec. 2004 for the start of formal accession talks (reftel). While they accept that the summit generated considerable progress in Turkish-EU relations (though not as much as Turkey would have liked), the cognoscenti recognize that the GOT's (and "TRNC President" Denktas') failure to ink a Cyprus deal in Copenhagen set back the Turkish cause on the island and in Brussels. This has prompted the Turks to engage in the time-honored practice of shifting blame; it also is providing an opportunity for Turks to question some of the basic assumptions of the GOT's traditional policy toward Cyprus. The noteworthy aspect of this reevaluation is that it is being generated primarily, albeit carefully, by AK in conjunction with some newfound provisional allies in the press.

-- On Dec. 17, AK Leader Erdogan publicly noted that AK and the "TRNC" share the same views on Cyprus, but emphasized that there is "no overlap" at all between the AK position and the Turkish State's traditionalist approach. Foreign Minister Yakis later observed publicly that if a solution is not found on Cyprus, the Turkish military would be regarded as "an occupying power" on EU territory.

-- Yakis' statements prompted a rebuttal from Deniz Baykal, leader of the opposition CHP (Republican People's Party) and political standard-bearer of the Establishment. Baykal called for Yakis' resignation, asserting that "of the six billion people on Earth, the Turkish Foreign Minister should be the last person to say such things. I don't know how we can correct the damage."

-- In a statement issued Dec. 18, the MFA supported ongoing negotiations on the Cyprus dispute but decried the admission of the Republic of Cyprus to the EU, charging that it was unacceptable legally or politically. A GOT "Foreign Policy Summit" -- featuring Gen. Hilmi Ozkok, the TGS Chief, President Sezer, P.M. Gul, FOMIN Yakis, MFA u/s Ziyal, and Denktas -- endorsed the MFA statement and mutuality of views between the GOT and the "TRNC."

3. (U) Reaction among opinion makers reflects the divide. The pro-CHP "Cumhuriyet" endorsed Baykal's call for Yakis' ouster and underscored the growing distance between AK and "TRNC President Denktas. Others, including "Milliyet's" Sami Kohen and "Radikal's" Ismet Berkan and Murat Yetkin, leaned the other way. Kohen described Denktas as an obstacle to a Cyprus solution, and as a liability to Turkey. "Hurriyet's" Cuneit Ulsever on Dec. 18 also drew attention, for virtually

the first time, to the pecuniary interests in Cyprus among Turkish Cyprus hard-liners, notably former foreign Ministers Sukru Sina Gurel and Muntaz Soysal, who is currently a close Denktas confidant. In the days before Copenhagen, Soysal, a dyed in-the-wool secularist formerly with CHP, accused Erdogan of being an "infidel" (gavur) for straying from the Establishment position on Cyprus.

AK's View

14. (C) In private meetings with us, AK officials dispense with diplomatic niceties regarding Denktas. On Dec. 17, an AK Parliamentary Group Deputy Chief described to us how before AK came to power, the idea of publicly questioning Denktas was akin to the third rail of Turkish politics. "We are the ones who opened the door to criticism of Denktas," not only for his handling of the Cyprus problem per se, but for helping to generate the economic morass on the island that has perpetuated poverty among Turkish Cypriots and Anatolian settlers in the north. On Dec. 18, Erdogan's former Chef de Cabinet, now an M.P., and several associates asserted to D/Polcouns that "Denktas is, and always has been, the biggest obstacle in the way of a solution on Cyprus and has to go." Picking up on Ulsever's article, the AK officials asserted that part of what perpetuates the status quo in Cyprus, and in GOT Cyprus policy, is the personal financial and other stakes Denktas and many influential mainland Turks maintain in the "TRNC."

Comment: "Government" vs. "State" Policy

15. (C) Undercutting Denktas is a tricky business that runs the risk of backfiring. Over the decades, the "TRNC" leader has built up relations with the Turkish Establishment that have insulated him from public scrutiny here. Moreover, there appears to be little obvious daylight between the MFA and the TGS on Cyprus-related issues. Denktas and his allies have also been able to play the nationalist card effectively in Turkey, raising the specter of betrayal as a club to keep critics in line. As Soysal once noted to us, "Istanbul capitalists might be willing to sell out on Cyprus, but fortunately Turkish policy is made in Ankara." He was not referring to Erdogan.

16. (C) The rise of AK, and a broader popular consensus in favor of EU accession, is beginning to shake some old assumptions. Reflecting the Soysal approach, the MFA took the unusual step after the Nov. 3 elections that brought AK to power of publicly suggesting that governments come and go, while "State policy" -- on Cyprus and in other areas -- endures and is not subject to change. At a minimum, Turks are now beginning to appreciate that there are major downside costs for Turkey to the business-as-usual approach to Cyprus issue.
PEARSON